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ABSTRACT

Various aspects of the current evolution/creationism controversy are reviewed including the impact of attempting to remove evolutionary material from textbooks and including creationist material. A number of viewpoints, opinions, and references from current literature are cited. (DS)

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EVOLUTION VS. CREATIONISM, 1973-1981

DONALD L. PRATT

A TECHNICAL PAPER PRESENTED AT THE

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The question of the origins of matter and life is a question that is dealt with by both science and theology. When the belief systems have clashed, there has been an enormous amount of energy expended to justify and defend deeply held beliefs. The scientific community and the clergy sharply disagreed in 1633 when Galileo was summoned before the Inquisition to recant his position that the earth moves around the sun. Although the Church eventually accepted this new position, science never forgot. Today, nearly 350 years later, the Galileo incident still appears in the science literature as evidence of theological interference and irrationality concerning science. Science News (1977) reports the present controversy of evolution vs. creationism as causing the greatest stir in the scientific community since Galileo. Evolution as a scientific theory is usually traced back to Charles Darwin's Origin of the Species, published in 1859. Serious conflict was evident in 1925 in the Scopes "monkey trial" where a Tennessee law barring the teaching of evolution in the public schools was challenged. This conflict has persisted to the present day. The Hillsborough County, Florida, school board recently voted to require alternative theories of origin to evolution to be taught in science classes.

As mentioned previously, the question of the teaching

of origins in the public schools has been an issue since 1925. The period 1973-1981 was unique, however, in that it represented the domination of the creationist movement by a single group--the Creation Research Society (CRS) and its associated Institute for Creation Research (ICR), research division of Christian Heritage College, San Diego. 1973 was the year that the College graduated its first class of two. According to Bioscience (September, 1979) all students were required to take 90 hours of creationism, Bible, and Christian apologetics. Each graduate was expected to be well enough trained to carry on the creationist message to his respective occupation. By 1979, CRS had a voting membership of 653 master's or doctor's degree holders and 1630 nonvoting members. CRS claims beginnings in California in 1963. In 1969 it claimed much publicity for its attempt at getting its views accepted for adoption by the California state education board (Levitt, 1976). In 1970 the CRS published its first textbook, Biology: A Search for Order in Complexity (revised, 1974). CRS has also published a quarterly journal and numerous books. When those supporting the evolutionist position refer to creationism, they almost invariably are referring to the CRS (or ICR) version.

What some writers of this period seem to fail to discern is that the CRS represents only one narrow view of creationism. There are other creation theories such as those reported in Christianity Today (1975, 1977). CRS has

been so established and organized since 1973, however, that few evolutionists refer to any other model of creation than the CRS version. CRS was militant from the beginning, seeking legislative action for their ideas and materials, particularly in behalf of their textbook. Science (September 12, 1980) suggests that Ronald Reagan's support of creationism was based on his political association with CRS. The sharpest critic of other creationist theories was the CRS itself. Gish (1973) identified the "day-age" theory and the "gap" theory. He spends his entire book explaining his theory and evaluates each of these alternative creation theories with one sentence each. About the "day-age" theory he says "This concept has severe Scriptural problems as well as scientific problems."[1] About the "gap" theory he says "This theory has Scriptural problems as well as serious scientific problems."[2]

CRS and evolutionist beliefs remained remarkable fixed and static during the 1973-1981 period. CRS beliefs were embodied in mostly conservative Baptist views of strictly literal Biblical interpretation and anti-humanist, anti-American Civil Liberties Union sentiment. Since the science curricular movement of the late sixties, the acceptance of evolution as an explanation of origins has been an almost unquestioned belief in all of the biological and scientific

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[1]Duane Gish, Evolution: the Fossils say No! (San Diego: Creation Life Publishers, 1973), p. 39.

[2]Ibid., p. 40.

journals. Almost all of them condemned creationism as religious in nature, unscientific, and unsuitable for use in a science course. Creationists (CRS) demanded equal time claiming that evolution was a religion of atheism and was equally unscientific. Evolutionists called the creationists dangerous religious fanatics.

The definition of creationism has not been presented until this point in this paper because it was necessary for the reader to understand who the CRS people were and why their theory had generally been understood to be THE theory of creationism. It is the CRS theory which is examined here. Morris (1977) cites the first and second laws of Thermodynamics as evidence for creation by a perfect Creator and subsequent deterioration in the order and complexity of life. Most Biologists see little applicability of these laws to the creationists' premises. The creationists believe that the Genesis account indicated a "catastrophic" creation where natural laws were suspended. The evolutionists do not see any observable evidence for this. Geologists generally believe in the Uniformitarianism Principle which asserts that past events can be understood in terms of processes going on now or "the present is the key to the past." Creationists reject the Uniformitarianism Principle completely. They believe that conventional explanations of sedimentary layering, earth movement, and fossilization is completely explainable on the basis of the "flood model," their explana-

tion of Geologic and Biologic events in relation to the flood experienced by Noah. Evolutionists see no scientific evidence of a flood that covered the entire earth and then left thousands of feet of sedimentary deposits. Creationists also believe the earth was created only a few thousand years ago. Most scientists put the date closer to four and one-half billion years ago. Creationists attach the notion that chance events could produce the first living cell since this probability by their calculations would be close to zero. Evolutionists counter that there were enough events for it to happen. All of the previous CRS ideas are extracted from The Scientific Case for Creation (Morris, 1977). Gish (1973) in Evolution: the Fossils Say No! sees evolution as unobservable and unprovable. Evolutionists see creationism's only evidence is the Bible and therefore is not acceptable as scientific evidence. Gish feels that evolutionists are biased against any religious emphasis. Evolutionists feel that creationists are anti-rational. Gish also disagrees with the evolutionary idea that the earth is very old. He believes it was created in six 24-hour days (literally). The gaps in the fossil record which fail to substantiate the "missing" links between different kinds of transitional life is cited as evidence in favor of creation. Evolutionists counter that gaps are expected because only a small number of animals are ever fossilized, and this process is very unpredictable. Creationists also question

other scientists' radio dating techniques. They have no faith in them at all. Finally, Gish feels that evolution provides the basis of humanism and atheism. One of the most outspoken critics was Dr. Tim LaHaye, pastor of Scott Memorial Baptist Church, San Diego, and chancellor of Christian Heritage College. Dr. LaHaye wrote the book The Battle for the Mind in which humanism is seen as a great threat to Christians. Even Jerry Falwell is associated with the creationist movement. To him, as well as the other creationists cited, evolution is linked to humanism and humanism is linked to moral decay and atheism.

As has been mentioned, humanism and atheism have been seen by creationists as undesirable side effects of evolution. It is important to understand the definitions of humanism and evolution from the creationist point of view. To them humanism is secular humanism as a religion. This point could be easily missed when reviewing their literature. While Gish (1973) does make this distinction, it is not emphasized. The view that humanism in the schools is simply the philosophy of individualizing instruction and emphasizing individual development, affective as well as cognitive, is not what the creationists mean by humanism. Evolution to the creationists refers only to the changes in living things (and non living things) prior to the time of Noah's flood. They agree with that which Biologists would call evolution or change in living things since the time of Noah's flood.

Present day genetics and the evolutionary development of the human races from a single race are accepted by the creationists. Creationists call this generation "after kinds." Biologists call it evolution.

The creation movement has had a good measure of impact. The feature of the March/April, 1981 edition of the Humanist was a series of articles under the title "Humanism Under Fire." Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, CRS, and Dr. Tim LaHaye are seen in these articles as great threats to humanism. The creationists' attempts for removing evolution from the science curriculum is seen as a threat to science. In 1968 the U.S. Supreme Court again ruled an antievolutionary statute in Arkansas unconstitutional. In 1969 humanism was blamed for the ills of California in a CRS sponsored proposal "Science Framework for the Public Schools." This proposal was adopted for a short time before being attacked by the National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT). CRS tried again in California in 1972 with Governor Reagan's endorsement to get its materials into the public school curriculum, but it was defeated again. In 1975 a Tennessee law requiring the teaching of creation in science classes was ruled unconstitutional after a suit by NABT. in 1977, Dr. John Moore, coauthor of the CRS text, received nationwide attention by teaching creationism in a Biology class at Michigan State University (apparently with the endorsement of MSU President Clifton Wharton, Jr.). A CRS petition in 1979 to

include creation as a part of the New York State Biology curriculum was turned down. Between January, 1980, and March, 1981, there were 14 states in which bills were submitted requiring the teaching of creationism in science classes. None of these passed. In 1981, Kelley Seagraves, director of CRS, obtained a court ruling that evolution could not be taught as dogma in California schools.

Another area of impact was the attempted inclusion of creationism (or the deletion of evolution) in state adopted textbooks. This effort was moderately successful. Textbook publishers, aware that a sizeable part of the general public was suspicious of evolution and favored creationism, became more cautious of their treatment of evolution. Most of the major publishers reduced evolutionary content substantially, eliminating whole topics in certain instances. Indiana in 1975 placed the CRS text on the adopted list. The same year Tennessee required a discussion of Genesis in its science textbooks. Also in 1975 California State Board of Education went along with a legal opinion that textbooks could not advocate evolution in their notes for teachers. By 1977, Superior court judge Michael Dugan ruled that the Indiana adoption of the CRS text was unconstitutional, but the same textbook was being adopted in the Dallas public schools the same year. A 1980 school board decision required all ninth grade teachers in DeKalb County, Georgia, to show without comment a CRS slide presentation of creationism.

As has been mentioned before the great majority of scientists reject creationism as being scientific in nature. The creationists admit that their position is not well accepted by the majority of the scientific community. The CRS theory which has been examined in this paper seems to be the most objectionable and extreme creationist theory to the scientific community. Other creationist (non CRS) theories range from complete compatibility with evolution to just short of the CRS position. Some creationists see Biblical and evolutionary knowledge as emphasizing different aspects of creation--Genesis explains what happened and evolution explains how it happened. Others see varying degrees of agreement and conflict between the two. Some believe that the "days" mentioned in Genesis could refer to any time period or age. Some accept the evolutionary processes of geologic history, but they reject the evolution of living things. Others can accept the evolution of plants and animals but not of humans from animals. Even the CRS believes in the evolution of mankind from an original race.

In the course of debating their positions, evolutionists and creationists have raised many philosophical questions and examined many areas of conflict. The debate does not appear to be ending. Both sides seem to have fixated on their reasoning and positions. The creationists see the evolutionists as elitists who are unwilling to even allow discussion on an issue seen important to the public at

large. The evolutionists see the creationists as religious fanatics who are trying to make religion into science. With all of the implications involved in this debate, one wonders whether the ordinary science teacher would have the time or background to fairly present this topic in an unbiased or adequate manner. One might surmise this from the statements of two science leaders quoted in Time magazine. Wayne Moyer, executive director of NABT said "We have done a botched job of teaching evolutionary theory, and we had better accept the creationist challenge to clean up our act."[3] Chemist Russell Doolittle added "At first I couldn't understand the gullibility of people. It took me a while to understand that the average American is not equipped to combat this sort of thing. The tragedy of it all is the state of science education in the country--it's simply, sadly, awful."[4] There is more to the creationist-evolution debate than the popular question "Did man evolve from the apes?".

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[3]Kennedy M. Pierce, "Putting Darwin Back in the Dock" Time (March 16, 1981), p. 82.

[4]Ibid.

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